

THE CROW

On-set Tragedy

A series of accidents led to the death of the film's star.

By William Wilson Goodson Jr.

On March 31, 1993, at about 12:30 in the morning, Brandon Lee was appearing in a scene wherein his character was supposed to walk through a door carrying a bag of groceries. Actor Michael Masee would then fire a blank at him with a .44 revolver. Lee was to detonate a squib in the grocery bag and collapse, making it seem as though he had been shot.

However, he didn't get up. The emergency medical personnel that were always on the set began CPR. He arrived at the New Hanover Regional Medical Center shortly after 1:00 a.m., with a penetrating wound to the abdomen. He was still alive and, after being stabilized, was taken to surgery. Surgeon Warren W. McMurray, M.D. reported intestinal injuries and major vascular injuries with extensive bleeding.

He was placed in the Intensive Care Unit shortly after 7:00 a.m., but, despite massive transfusions, he died at 1:04 p.m.

His fiancée Eliza Hutton, a story editor, arrived from L.A. shortly before he expired. They had been scheduled to marry in April. His mother, Linda Caldwell, arrived from Idaho, where she lives with her second husband, about five hours later.

On April 3, Brandon Lee was buried beside his father, Bruce Lee, in Seattle, Washington.

Initially, speculation centered on his being wounded by



His vengeance complete, Eric returns to the grave, anticipating a reunion with Shelly.

a fragment of the squib. However, the next day an autopsy discovered an actual .44 bullet lodged near his spine. There was no immediate explanation as to why there would be live ammo on a movie set. Rumors that the pistol had been borrowed for target shooting appeared.

The official ruling by investigators of the NC Labor Department's Division of Occupational Safety and Health was that live .44-calibre bullets had been used to produce dummy bullets.

Dummy bullets look just like real bullets, but have no powder charge inside so they can't explode. They are used for closeups of a gun. Blank cartridges are designed to explode for sound effects, but lack the slug, the tip of a cartridge that is actually propelled from the gun. The gun powder was removed from some live bullets to make dummies.

One of the dummy bullets

still contained enough powder so that when the gun was fired, the slug on the tip separated from the bullet and lodged in the barrel.

Later, when the blank was fired, it propelled the slug out of the Smith and Wesson Magnum revolver as if it were being normally fired.

Crowvision Inc., the production company for THE CROW, was fined \$70,000 for allowing live ammunition on the set, \$7,000 for not having the guns checked between each scene, and \$7,000 for not prohibiting the firing of guns at persons during filming, as well as not having protective shields for all personnel in close proximity to blanks being fired from a weapon.

Executive producer Bob Rosen responded, "We made every effort to comply with all applicable OSHA safety standards. We do not believe there is any basis for the citations,

and intend to appeal all of them."

How could such a series of accidents occur? Most theories center around the fact that the non-union crew had been working long hours, often at night, and made some mistakes through exhaustion. Their firearms consultant, James Macer, had been released since all scenes with automatic weapons had already been finished. It has not been revealed who actually loaded the gun or handed it to Masee.

Michael Masee has not made any public statement, so we don't know why he aimed the gun directly at Lee. However, he was being filmed from two angles. He may have been unsure which direction he could point the gun and still look like he was aiming at Lee.

The lack of protective vest was probably because the squib was in the grocery bag, not attached to him.

Wilmington D.A. Jerry Spivey has announced there will be no negligent homicide charges. Also, Crowvision Inc. and Edward R. Pressman Film Corporation have reached a settlement in the lawsuit brought by Brandon Lee's estate. An undisclosed payment will be made to his mother, Linda Cadwell, and his fiancée, Eliza Hutton.

Immediately after the accident, the official word was that a month would be taken to assess whether or not completion of the film would be possible, although rumor had it that

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work actually commenced within a week. (Such urgency is hardly atypical under the circumstances, when insurance and completion bond companies prefer to have the film completed rather than to pay off on expensive policies.) Pressman was reported as saying that "Brandon's work was essentially done on the film." The unfinished week of shooting involved mostly flashbacks of the Crow's normal life, before the murder. These scenes were either redesigned or dropped, with the result that Eric's relationship with his fiancée receives much less attention than in the comic book and his murder has been rendered in an unavoidably incomprehensible montage, one of the most obvious tell-tale signs of the behind-the-scenes tragedy. □

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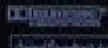


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